DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 200 059 FL 012 255

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TITLE Problems in Teaching Oral American English to ESL Students: A Conversation Analysis and ESL Textbook Review.
INSTITUTION California Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages.
PUB DATE 80
NOTE 10p.; In its CATESOL Occasional Papers, Number 6, p56-64, Fall 1980. Slightly revised version of a paper presented at the CATESOL State Conference (Los Angeles, CA, 1979).

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Content Analysis; *Discourse Analysis; *English (Second Language); *Language Styles; *North American English; Postsecondary Education; Secondary Education; Second Language Instruction; *Standard Spoken Usage; Textbooks

ABSTRACT

Several frequently used oral language constructions are discussed in order to discover how frequently native speakers use these constructions, to observe which form of a disputed construction native speakers choose, and to review several widely used English as a Second Language (ESL) textbooks to determine whether or not they address these choices. Six language items were selected for study in spontaneous conversational exchanges between native speakers of current American English. Three talk shows on radio and television were analyzed and data are provided from 57 hours of television and radio conversation. In the analysis, level of discourse and language background of the speakers were considered. A textbook analysis revealed that usage appearing frequently in competent speech is not taught, nor is there attention to the informal spoken language register. It is suggested that teachers must recognize that a construction is neglected in the textbook, and then decide how to teach it, including an indication to the students regarding the variation between the textbook construction and the one used often in informal speech. (AMH)

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ED200059

California Association - Teachers of
English to Speakers of Other Languages

CATESOL Occasional Papers
Number 6 (Fall, 1980)

PROBLEMS IN TEACHING ORAL AMERICAN ENGLISH TO ESL STUDENTS: A CONVERSATION ANALYSIS AND ESL TEXTBOOK REVIEW

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The problem was not a new one, but it had remained in the back of my mind until a middle-aged Polish woman, a physician who had practiced for many years in California, said to me, "You're an English teacher; maybe you can answer my question. Why is it that when Americans say 'you,' they often mean 'I' or 'everyone' or anyone but 'you'."

All living languages have a foggy area of change, in which some aspects of grammar or some vocabulary items are either slipping into disuse or gaining usage within the educated population. The Polish doctor's question brought into focus the time I had wondered whether to teach a beginning ESL class "Whom did you talk to?" or "Who did you talk to?" or "To whom did you talk?" The texts used in the course offered very little assistance. Rex Stewart Dalzell (1975) very precisely addresses the problem of correctness within this area of change:

> This question of "correctness" requires careful consideration. In general terms, it is usage, or the rule of the majority, which determines the correctness or the incorrectness of the language being used. More specifically, a particular language pattern is correct if the majority of competent mother-tongue English speakers accept it as such. When the change is taking place, however, it is very difficult to measure the extent of that change and hence to know in fact if it has been accepted by the majority of competent mother-tongue English speakers.

The problem of choosing to teach one form of a disputed construction over another to our ESL students would not be considerable, except that many of the constructions in the doubtful area are among those most frequently used by native speakers in all levels of discourse.

This paper will discuss several of these frequently used oral language constructions in order to discover how frequently native speakers do use these constructions, to observe which form of a disputed construction native speakers choose, and to review several widely used ESL texts to determine whether or not they address these choices. My purpose is neither to reach solid conclusions nor to make stern recommendations, but instead to encourage discussion within the field on a subject of concern to classroom teachers of all levels and to their students who wish to become fluent English speakers.

In order to conduct the study as systematically as possible, I selected six language items. These constructions had appeared to my students

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A slightly different version of this paper was presented at the 1979 CATESOL State Conference in Los Angeles.

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and me to be particularly problematical both in terms of choices native speakers make when conversing with one another and of choices textbooks make for the ESL students. The following are the items for this study:

a. You, as the generic pronoun, vs. one.
b. who vs. whom in the objective case.
c. everyone...their vs. everyone...his, or everyone...his or her.
d. have got as a verb showing possession.
e. have got to as a modal indicating necessity.
f. good as an adverb.

The first item, you as the generic pronoun vs. the traditionally preferred one, interests me because what is formally taught both to first and second language learners seems rarely to appear in American speech. Of the following two constructions, which would appear more often in conversation between two native-speaking Americans? "You can avoid paying taxes, but you might get caught;" or "One can avoid paying taxes, but one (or he) might be caught." To a perfectly fluent immigrant, such as the Polish physician, a problem with hearing you instead of one may only lie in the desire to speak like every other citizen. To a beginning second language learner, having learned that you means you, singular or plural, a problem may also lie in his possibly misunderstanding the speaker in a conversation.

Whether to use who or whom in the objective case, especially as the object of a preposition, is not a problem vital to communication. But the misuse of who signals illiteracy to many listeners, while the correct use of whom may seem stuffy or snobbish to others. Which should our beginning students be taught in pattern practices and games?

Only relatively recently has it been a problem whether to say "Everyone should do his work as well as he can," or "Everyone should do his or her work as well as he or she can," or "Everyone should do their work as well as they can." This construction is particularly controversial in that the first form is deemed objectionable because of its masculine gender, the second because it is awkward and wordy, and the third because it lapses in grammatical agreement. Again, for the sake of clear communication only, the problem is not vital. In terms of fluency, frequency of usage in speech, and correctness, however, the choice is more difficult.

The constructions have got and have got to are of interest to this study for several reasons.[1] They differ grammatically, of course: have got is a verb showing possession ("I've got a dollar and a half in my savings account."); and have got to is a modal synonymous with must or have to. ("I've got to start cutting down on bread and potatoes.") Although they differ, they share several characteristics. Grammatically, both occur only in the present tense. I've got reverts to I had in the past and I will or am going to have in the future; similarly, I've got to reverts to I had to in

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[1]One of the reasons is that several students have asked me that difficult question, "What does 'got' mean?" There are several other got constructions that could be examined, among them the passive got + participle ("All the cake got eaten."), or the got + adjective that seems always to be preferred over become + adjective ("And then we got sick"). I have not reviewed texts to see how they teach these constructions.

the past and I will or am going to have to in the future. Similarities also occur in pronunciation. When spoken, got receives the stress in both constructions, and have is reduced to its place in the contraction with the subject noun or pronoun (except in the emphatic, "I have got to get up earlier." where only to is reduced). In both constructions, then, what reaches the listener's ear is the /g/ and open /a/ of got. To someone unpracticed in listening for the have got or have got to constructions, comprehension would be difficult. Comprehension might be difficult, also, if the students had not studied these constructions enough to anticipate their grammatical functions within a sentence. Compare the pronunciation of these utterances:

"She's gotta run her car for ten minutes before it warms up."
"She's gotta run in her stocking again."

The last item of my study, good used as an adverb, will grate on any English teacher's ear as disagreeably as fingernails scraping on a chalkboard. But my curiosity and my desire to study usage in various degrees of controversy led me to observe how often native speakers prefer, "I've been doing pretty good in math" over "I've been doing pretty well in math."

Having selected these six items, I had to decide upon a source of conversation suitable for the first part of my study: to determine how frequently native speakers use these constructions and which variant they choose. Several requirements governed my decision: the conversations had to be spontaneous exchanges between native speakers of current American English; the conversations had to vary in levels of discourse appropriate for them; and they had to include the speech of people with a wide variety of backgrounds. With these requirements in mind, and searching for a source of systematic study, I decided to examine several television and/or radio "talk shows." I selected three: the Phil Donahue Show and the Merv Griffin Show on television, and a sports phone-in show on radio called KNBR Sportsphone. I anticipated that the Phil Donahue Show would provide the conversation of well-educated people speaking spontaneously but knowledgeably on a given subject[2]; that the Merv Griffin show would provide conversation among people who varied in background but who generally used speech acceptable to all the public; and that KNBR Sportsphone would provide conversation among people from every imaginable background. (See Table No. 1 for the data provided from 57 hours of television and radio conversation.)

With the first two items, have got and have got to, I wished merely to discover how frequently they appear in speech. I did not feel it necessary to compare their frequency with that of the indisputable have and have to (or must). That have got was used 38 times in 57 hours seems to indicate that it is a regularly chosen construction. It appeared both in the interrogative: "Well, how many children have you got anyway?" (Merv Griffin); and in the declarative: "I haven't got the faintest idea." (Phil Donahue). Notice that as the conversational situation decreases in formality, have got increases in usage. Have got to, the modal form, appeared quite regularly also considering that, as it indicates necessity, it would not appear as frequently as a neutral term. It appeared both in its unstressed, unemphatic form: "But you've gotta be crazy to begin with, don't you?" (MG); and in its stressed, emphatic form: "It's certainly something that all married couples nowadays have got to realize" (PD). Again, have got to increased slightly

[2]Although audience participation was also included in the data.

in usage as the level of discourse became less formal and the language backgrounds of the speakers broadened.

TABLE NO. 1
TELEVISION AND RADIO CONVERSATION DATA

	have got (poss.)	have got (modal)	good (adverb)	who (obj. case)	everyone/ their	you (generic)
Phil Donahue (17-1/2 hrs.)	4	6	0	4	13	24
Merv Griffin (12-1/2 hrs.)	13	7	1	7	4	18
KNBR Sports Talk Show (27 hrs.)	21	9	16	11	24	37
Totals	38	22	17	22	41	79

	whom (obj. case)	everyone/ his	everyone/ his or her	one (generic)
Phil Donahue	4	2	3	2
Merv Griffin	4	1	2	1
KNBR Sports	1	1	0	0
Totals:	9	4	5	3

Keeping level of discourse and language backgrounds of the speakers in mind, observe the distribution of the choice of good over well.[3] Seventeen occurrences in 57 hours is high for a usage much in dispute, but all but one of them occurred in informal discussions about sports. (There may be few other topics of discussion, even among the well educated, that invite good as an adverb as much as sports seems to.) The following example from Sportsphone illustrates a trend that others besides myself have observed--the dropping of the -ly suffix from adverbs, signalling the preference of the adjective over the adverb form: "He's been working real hard for us all season, and toward the end he was shooting real good for us." More discourse analysis is needed before the trend can really be evaluated, but as yet the choice of adjective over adverb seems to be confined to very informal speech.

The data for the next three items, which show how frequently a speaker chose an alternative construction in contradiction to the traditionally pre-

[3]In hindsight, I regret that I did not count the number of times well was preferred as the adverb so their usage could be more effectively compared.

ferred one, may provide more striking results because the comparison in language choice is more direct. Notice, for instance, how frequently the generic you was preferred over the generic one.[4] You sometimes meant everyone: "Why can't you use all the alternatives available to you?" (PD); and sometimes referred to a large category of people, in this case all basketball coaches: "When you turn the guards loose too early, you lose a lot of effectiveness" (KNBR).

The ratio of the occurrence of who over whom in the objective case, 22/9, is not as striking as the ratio of you over one, but it is still significant. Consistently (every time but one), who in the objective case appeared as the object of a preposition: "Then who's he playing for now?" (KNBR). Often the preposition was part of a two-word verb: "I wonder who parents, or anyone else for that matter, can turn to when they've lost faith in their doctors" (PD). When whom was preferred in the objective case, it appeared either in an adjective clause or directly following a preposition: "He's a gentleman who I admire very much" (MG); "Yes, of course, now, he was the doctor after whom parents started naming their children" (PD). These results show that the syntactic pattern of a given utterance will influence the speaker's choice. If the pronoun is adjacent to the construction objectifying it (whom I admire, after whom), the speaker seems to be able to choose the correct case within the small grammatical group. However, if several words or phrases separate the pronoun from the construction of which it is the object (especially when the pronoun appears first), then the speaker seems to lose track of grammatical case in favor of retaining his train of thought, and he chooses who to serve in either case.

The everyone/their form appeared very often in conversation, preferred over the "sexist" his form and the wordy his or her form. Predictably, everyone/their occurred when the utterance referred to all of mankind: "Everyone has their own rhythms, based on the heartbeat" (PD) When everyone/his or her occurred, the speaker's intonation and sentence rhythm usually indicated that the his or her was an uncomfortable or at least unfamiliar construction, and that it was chosen self-consciously instead of everyone/he: "Well, you know, every singer, Merv, knows better than anyone else what is best for his--his or her,uh, performance" (MG). The most remarkable occurrence of everyone/their, though, occurred not within a conversation at all, but in a television commercial for a Pentax camera: "After all, everyone has their price." Clearly, the company thoughtfully, not spontaneously, preferred everyone/their over either of the other forms, presumably on the assumption that it would be the form acceptable to the greatest percentage of the audience. Or, if one would rather believe that the deviant construction was a "mistake" that made its way onto national television, shouldn't one wonder about the validity of a rule that all the people involved in writing and filming a television commercial would forget or would choose to disregard?

At this point, one must begin to wonder how to judge the trend reflected in this data. Is the language deteriorating as Edwin Newman, among many others, says it is, and as Matthew Arnold said it was in the 19th century and Samuel Johnson in the 18th century? Or is it changing, some of us preferring

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[4] I must add that at times it is difficult to distinguish between the plural you and the generic you--I only counted the instances when I was certain of the contextual meaning.

the change, some of us accepting it, and some of us resisting it? To the individual native speaker the problem is relatively unimportant. As a competent speaker since childhood, he knows that language choices are available and can learn whatever speech pattern he chooses to learn. To the English teacher of native speakers, the problem is not urgent, either. He can teach his students to use the language he feels is correct, and the students can choose whether or not to alter their language behavior. Again, the native speaking student knows what choices are available and can learn to use any construction he feels is appropriate for a given conversation. ESL students, though, are a kind of captive audience, and as their teachers, we make most of their language choices for them during the first years of the language learning process.

One of the most important choices we make for our students is the choice of the basic classroom text. The second part of my study, after determining how often and in which form these selected items of usage occurred was to review several popular classroom ESL series to determine how they teach these items. The following is a list of the series reviewed:

Robert Dixson, Complete Course in English, Books 1-4. (New York: Regents Publishing Company, 1972.)

Robert Lado, Lado English Series, Books 1-6. (New York: Regents Publishing Company, 1970.)

Lars Mellgren and Michael Walker, New Horizons in English, Books 1-5. (Menlo Park: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1974.)

New English 900, Books 1-6. (New York: Collier-Macmillan International, 1977.)

Willard D. Sheller, Welcome to English, Books 1-6. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976.)

Richard Yorkey, et al., English for International Communication. (New York: American Book Company, 1978.)

I expected to find that the texts would teach the more conservative or traditional choices for the particularly controversial items. That was the case only with good vs. well as the adverb. Every text addressed the grammatical difference between the two, each preferring the traditional usage: "He's a good boy; he does well in school." Certainly good as an adverb remains at the unacceptable end of the scale of controversial usages, but one cannot predict whether it will eventually recede into disuse or advance into acceptability.[5] None of the texts reviewed addressed the construction everyone/his vs. everyone/their. Grammar instruction and exercises began with constructions like "Everyone had a good time" and moved to "Everyone should wear a raincoat." The possibility of "Everyone should wear his/her or her/their raincoat was never acknowledged.

Who was distinguished from whom in three of the six series: Lado, Dixon,

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[5]Could the following be an indication? The Department of Motor Vehicles Driver's Handbook has officially accepted "Drive slow when approaching an intersection."

and New English 900. All three texts treated them similarly, preferring whom to who in the objective case for dialogues and practice exercises, etc., and each of them mentioning to the teacher that who was usually acceptable in informal speech, especially as the object of a preposition. The lessons in these three texts, correspond to the data gathered from native speakers' conversation. This was not the case, however, with the other three texts. The grammatical situation calling for whom never appeared; instead, only such constructions as "Who went with you?" or "Who lives with you?" were taught.

Two of the series recognized the existence of the modal have got to. New English 900 contains pattern practices changing I have to, she has to, etc. to I've got to, she's got to, etc., with a note to the teacher explaining that have got to occurs more frequently in fairly informal conversation. Book 3 of the Sheeler series contains have got to in dialogues and in pronunciation practice for emphatic intonation. The Sheeler series, also, is the only series of the six to address the verbal construction have got showing possession. Book 3 contains pattern practices converting I have, she has, etc., with no annotation concerning level of discourse.

Searching for lessons addressing the usage you vs. one proved equally fruitless. Only Lado recognized the appearance of you in conversation, citing you along with one and they as generic pronouns. All the exercises preferred one; for instance, "One can't believe everything he reads."[6] In the other series neither one nor you was taught as the generic pronoun, yet you occurred 79 times in 57 hours, and one occurred three times.

The results of my conversation analysis and textbook reviews, I believe, reveal a disconcerting discrepancy between what is used and what is taught within the area of language change in spoken American English. These results prompt me to make some additional comments and some tentative conclusions.

The problems of the ESL student, if not taught these constructions, can be of varying severity. The absence of those constructions not difficult for the ESL listener to comprehend--who vs. whom, everyone/his vs. everyone/their, and good vs. well--may do nothing more than to cause slight confusion at first. The absence of those constructions more difficult to understand--you vs. one, have got, and have got to--may cause more lasting confusion of the kind that would cause a Polish immigrant to wonder what Americans mean when they say "you," or students to ask "What does 'got' mean?" The absence of any or all of them may well cause students to wonder why they have not learned the same speech patterns they hear native speakers, including educated adults, use. If the students advanced through their first years learning only the English taught in any of the texts reviewed for this paper, I feel that their language-learning experience would be deficient.

Clearly, second language students do not learn from their textbooks alone. They have their English teachers, and, if they are studying English in an English-speaking country, they have the invaluable opportunity to acquire language through conversation with native speakers. If the textbook ignores or avoids the kinds of commonly used expressions I have studied, the

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[6]Notice that with the use of one, the sticky problem of gender appears again. You, like everyone/their, allows the speaker to sidestep that problem by foregoing the rule.

burden indeed falls on the shoulders of the teacher and the students. The responsibility for the teacher is two-fold: first, he or she has to recognize that the construction appears very frequently in competent speech and that the textbook is deficient for failing to address it. Then he or she has to decide how to teach the construction, including an indication to the students whether or not the usage taught for speech will differ from the form most frequently heard.

If the teacher either does not recognize the deficiency in the text or does not wish to decide how to teach the controversial construction to the student, then the student will learn for himself. I think that, with constructions used as frequently by native speakers as my data indicate these are used, the student aspiring to fluent communication would hear the constructions and learn to use them. The problem inherent in informal acquisition can also be inferred from the results of my study. If a student were not taught the construction everyone/his, would he learn everyone/his or everyone/their from conversation with native speakers? Similarly, would he learn to say, "One has to study hard in school if he wants good grades" or "You have to study hard in school if you want good grades"? Additionally, if a learner only learned "Who lives with you?" in the classroom, would he learn to ask "Whom do you live with?" or "Who do you live with?"[7] I would contend that a learner who has been left to learn the frequently used constructions informally would learn the form used most widely by his partners in conversation.

The burden of recognition and choice, I feel, lies squarely with the teacher. This observation is not original with me. J. Donald Bowen (1972) touches close to the heart of this matter when he distinguishes between the oral and written languages.

> An important responsibility of the second language classroom that is not shared by first language teaching is to adequately present oral, informal language.... A student familiar only with the formal language is likely to be lost when the situation is authentically informal.... [The teacher] needs to have a set of text materials that incorporates this knowledge [of informal, oral language] into meaningful and appropriate situations.

Until more text materials of this kind are available, and there are certainly more now than there were at the time of Bowen's writing, teachers should be aware of and will, I hope, encourage further discussion of these problems arising from everyday expressions within the realm of language change. Let me make a final comment to the ESL teacher through the voice of Dalzell:

> Unreasoned resistance to change in language is not commendable. But for the student whose mother tongue is not English, it is probably wiser to err on the side of conservatism than on the side of radicalism. Too many students of English as a later

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[7] The chance of his learning "Who do you live with?" may be doubled if his text taught only "Who lives with you?" for he would not only hear who often in conversation, but would very likely automatically transfer the pronoun from one grammatical case to the other.

language unwittingly attempt to hasten the process of change--and the results are often unfortunate. For change in English, as in any language, can come about only through the use and acceptance of new forms by native speakers of the language.

The central purposes of my discussion have been to inform ESL teachers of what I feel is a deficiency in many texts, and to encourage further discussion. But part of my purpose has also been to encourage teachers to use care in making language choices for their students. If the students do not receive classroom instruction in the relatively informal spoken language, they will either be lost in day-to-day conversations or will acquire the language themselves. If they are left to acquire it themselves, they may not be as sensitive as they should be to the various levels of discourse which can govern speech, or to the aura of unacceptability or acceptability that colors the forms within the area of change in language.

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